



Did we walk
away from
our future?

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The INQUIRER

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Inquiring Words



Clouds

Clouds.

Just clouds.

Clouds just go by.

Smudges of lead white and grey applied to the canvas of the sky.
Water vapour doing vacuous exercises.

Yet today,

this day,

these crumbling shrines command the boy's eye in my vision.

Shape shifting,

ever expanding possibilities touching the firmament of my imagination,

sculptures of flapping sail ripped,
torn by ghost fingers.

Is the grace of this aerial ballet meaningless in a meaningless universe

or are these crisp origami creations folded,
painstakingly,

with an intention to awaken the onlooker?

Why is it that clouds are simply below me,

beyond the artexed ceiling I construct out of small thinking?

What other glimpses of other worlds do I miss everyday in this life?

— John Harley

Photo by Michael & Christa Richert, via RGB Stock

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Holding on to a Unitarian vision



Shutterstock image

By John Pickering

Can you remember how the future was supposed to be? I remember sitting up to watch the Apollo 11 Moon landing; seeing Neil Armstrong take his first "small step" onto the Luna surface. Back then in the heady days of "Moon fever" everyone was captivated by the idea of men on the Moon; science fiction was fast becoming a reality.

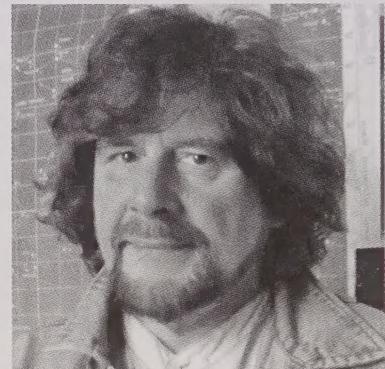
Patrick Moore and other astronomical pundits drew grand visions of Luna colonies where explorers and scientists could live and work. The vast mineral wealth of the Moon would soon be mined for the benefit of humanity. More importantly, as the Moon is only a short distance from Earth space bases would be constructed on the Luna surface from which new spacecraft, unhampered by the constraints of Earth's gravity, could be launched to explore the solar system and beyond, without the need for the trillions of dollars of fuel needed to escape from Earth's gravity. Scientifically and economically it seemed the obvious first step into the Universe.

The Apollo missions continued; astronauts rode across the Moonscape on the "Luna Buggy" and we could see the grand design of a cosmic future being shaped before our eyes. The Moon missions had captured the imagination of the world and on the astronaut's return ticker-tape rained down like a million meteors across the skyline. The intrepid Apollo explorers had walked upon the Moon and survived to come home as heroes – and then – well, they simply stayed home. All the grand dreams of Moon colonies spun by bewitched astronomers and scientists were quietly forgotten. There was no more talk of Luna Bases from which humanity could journey to the stars; instead technicians and engineers turned to the more mundane but complex problems of putting manned vehicles into Low Earth orbit and constructing unmanned robot probes to explore the near planets and the rest of the solar system.

Diseases cured, robots and leisure time

Back in the 1960s, scientists, futurists and science-fiction writers predicted that by the 1990s, science would have cured most diseases and brought us a world of leisure, where all the mundane work was done by automated machines and

computers. Humanoid robots would walk amongst us, doing the housework and even looking after our children. But in the last days of Bill Clinton's Presidency, the congressional committee on manned exploration of the Luna surface was told that it would now be 26 years before NASA had the technology to put men back on the Moon.



John Pickering

By the year 2000, androids still did not dream of electric sheep and the world of 'Dan Dare' was, at best, still a distant fantasy. In 2014 NASA admitted that they had even forgotten just how they put men on the Moon in the first place.

How did all the enthusiastic pundits and scientists get it so wrong?

What happened to the future as *you* thought it would be? Coming back down to earth, what was your 20th-century vision of the Unitarian future? Do you still have the same vision today – or have time and events drawn other possibilities for the future of the Unitarian Movement?

In thinking about this article, my wife Katie reminded me that the past is history; the future a mystery and the present a gift. How we – individually and collectively – use this gift will determine our probable future.

So, what is your vision for the future?

Proverbs 29:18 says: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish'. This is a verse oft quoted for decades by both ministers and church leaders of all denominations in an effort to try, at best, to initiate some kind of revival; and, at worst, to hoodwink believers into following some kind of spiritual entrepreneurialism. At face value, Proverbs 29:18 seems to fit the need for a vision for the future and yet it is one of the most

(Continued on page 6)

Executive Committee key messages

Executive Committee Key Messages 23&24 January 2015

1. Ministerial Competency Framework

The Executive Committee considered a report from Rev Daniel Costley, Chair of the Ministry Strategy Group on Ministerial Competencies and Ministerial Training. It was agreed:

- a.) That the Ministerial Competences and Assessment mechanisms (the "Ministerial Competency Framework") be approved; and
 - b) That external, expert support will be brought in to assist the development of the next stage of the review of training.
- The EC thanked everyone who had been involved in the development of the Competencies which represented a major step forward for professional Ministry.

2. 2020 Congregational Development Programme

Members of the 2020 Leadership Team: Rev. Andy Pakula, Alexandra Zgliczka with Christina Smith, updated the Executive Committee on progress with the Derby rekindling project announced at the last Annual Meetings. The co-operation with the East Midlands Union (EMU) was proving very valuable and there was joint funding of the project. Christina outlined the work that had already been initiated and the plans for the future. The EC considered how best to support the 2020 Leadership Team with the project and also the dissemination of learning about congregational growth to other parts of the country.



Sheena Gabriel



Nicky Jenkins

3. General Assembly Roll of Ministers and Lay Pastors

The Executive Committee was pleased to add the following to the Roll with Full status having completed their period with Probationary status:

The Rev Sheena Gabriel

The Rev Nicky Jenkins

The Rev Sue Woolley

The following were approved for Ministry training:

Claire MacDonald to be trained for the ministry based at

HMCO over two years commencing 2015. Andy Phillips to be trained for the ministry based at HMCO with a flexible training programme likely to commence in 2016.

4. Honorary Membership of the General Assembly

Honorary Membership is the highest honour that the General Assembly can bestow and is awarded to an individual for long and consistent service nationally who has thereby made a significant contribution towards the furtherance of the GA's objectives. The Executive Committee, following extensive consultation with Districts, has agreed to nominate Dawn Buckle as an Honorary Member at the forthcoming Annual Meetings.

5. Vice President of the General Assembly 2015/16

Unfortunately no proposals were received for the position of Vice-President for the year 2015/16 and no nomination would be made to the Annual Meetings this year. Invitations normally sent to the Vice-President should be sent to the Chief Officer who will discuss with the President how they would be dealt with and Past Presidents may be called upon to assist.

6. Executive Committee membership

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that after nearly three years without a permanent Treasurer, Peter Hanley agreed to be co-opted immediately and will be nominated as Honorary Treasurer at the Annual Meetings for the year 2015/16.

It was with regret that the Executive Committee accepted the resignation of Louise Rogers. We would like to thank Louise for all her work on the Executive Committee over the last two years. She has agreed to continue as chair of the Local Leadership Strategy Group.

7. Executive Committee Elections

A report of the outcome of the Election was received with only two candidates – Marion Baker and Gwynn Pritchard – nominated for the four positions, who had been declared elected unopposed and would take up post in April 2015. The General Assembly Constitution places a responsibility on the Executive Committee to fill the two remaining vacancies by co-option until the next Election (2017). As part of this process the EC will at its next meeting undertake a trustee skills assessment to identify any gaps that should be filled.

8. GA Representative on International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU)

Dr Jacky Woodman was appointed to one of the two positions to join the Chief Officer on ICUU's Council.

9. Consultation on Nominating/Volunteering Group

The Executive Committee has been aware of the increasing difficulties of securing nominees to serve in various positions. The EC also faces a difficult balancing act of having formally to decide on appointments and nominations and how to encourage people to come forward. It has been suggested that a Nominating/Volunteering Group be established, with involvement of District leaders who are more likely to know talented individuals, to help encourage and identify suitable nominees and a consultation paper will shortly be issued to Districts for views. A workshop will also be held at the Annual Meetings on the idea.

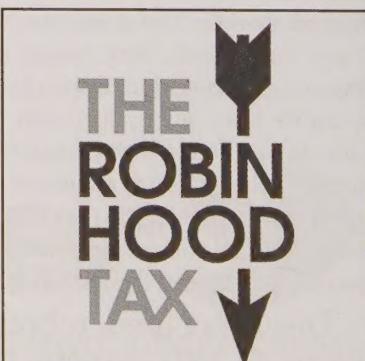
10. Annual Accounts 2013/14

The Annual Accounts of the General Assembly and the Nightingale Centre were approved and those of the Sustentation Fund received (the latter has its own trustee body).

11. Robin Hood Tax Campaign

In 2010 the Annual Meetings approved a Resolution supporting the "Robin Hood Campaign" for a tax levy on international tax transactions. Since then the campaign has made considerable progress in Europe. An appeal for financial support to take forward the work has been received and it was agreed to donate £100 as a contribution.

Executive Committee, 3 February 2015



It's time to talk about leadership

In this fifth in the series of columns on a future vision for Unitarians, **Nicky Jenkins** looks at leadership.

At the Executive Committee's Day of Visioning on the main issues affecting our church as discovered by President Marion Baker in her 'Listening to People' tour, we discovered that leadership was an issue for many of us for many reasons.

- It was often unclear who the leader was
- There was lack of clarity in the roles of ministers, committees and trustees as to leadership
- There was little understanding of types of leadership or leadership skills
- Many churches spent all their time and energy on management tasks leaving nothing for visionary work
- We lack confidence or permission to lead
- There is no area/district level leadership
- In a leadership vacuum we are open to 'takeover bids' from unsuitable people
- The Chief Officer role is not that of a visionary leader
- Ministers sometimes fail to lead when it conflicts with their pastoral role
- We are too individualistic

Some positive comments were made.

- We are less constrained by our leadership than other denominations
- We can be leaders in different roles and projects or for short periods of time
- Modern culture leads people to expect more involvement and less top-down authority
- We have flexibility

In a time of increasing change we are more in need of leadership than ever. Resources are limited. It is not likely that each church that wants a minister will get one, or even half a minister.

The days of '12 steps to an effective church' are over. Yes, we do need good systems to keep everything running, but we need to be adaptable and led by a vision of who we are and where we want to go. Sometimes we fall into the mistake of worshipping our committee system rather than being at the service of life itself.

Edwin Friedman's book *Leadership in the Age of the quick fix: A failure of Nerve* finds the answers in Systems Theory. Originally used as a way of working with families in therapy, it explains the way church communities work. One person can take on and personify the dis-ease of the whole congregation. We are all interdependent as part of this system. Institutions work as systems in the same way families do. Leaders therefore need to understand themselves and the way their place in their own family dynamics has shaped them.

Chronic anxiety affects our organisations very negatively. It produces reactivity, blaming, quick fixes and a lack of well-differentiated leadership.

The underlying causes for this gridlock are always emotion-

al, not intellectual.

- Leaders need to be free to try things without fear of losing their job or position.
- Leaders must be able to tolerate others' pain and not fix it
- Stress and burn out are caused by taking on too much responsibility for others.
- Leaders must know when to make others do something rather than do it themselves
- Leaders need to have stamina, resolve, self-regulation and remain connected
- It will be temporarily more acutely painful to escape a chronically painful system
- Good decisions are a result of how we act after the decision was made

A Good Leader

- Needs to take responsibility for their own emotional being
- Should be non-anxious: not 'peace at all costs'
- Should expect sabotage
- Must be motivated
- Understands boundaries and is unthreatened
- Does not rely on the group for his or her own meaning.

When we look at examples of successful leaders in our church, ones who have brought about growth, we tend to ask them, 'What did you do?' So they give us a long list of activities and innovations and we try to do the same but it doesn't work for us. Why is that? Perhaps we asked the wrong question. Perhaps we should have asked 'Who were you?'

Two examples of ministers I know who have grown their congregations have different theologies, different backgrounds and created different styles of church. Each has some skills and talents which the other does not share and could not implement in their church. Some people say they both have that elusive quality, charisma. But what is charisma? It is, I believe, a certain level of self-faith, of certainty that their approach is correct. These leaders are bold. They make big plans and people follow them. They do not back down when challenged. They are not afraid to be unkind on occasion. It is not what these leaders chose to do that made them successful, it was who they are.

How can we develop such attributes in those in leadership positions?

I think training can help. I believe we have, in our congregations, people with skills and knowledge on leadership. Up-to-date thinking is vital. We have members who work in the third sector, who have skills for working with volunteers. We have people who work in education or teacher training who, again, have experience with leadership skills. Can we put out a call for trainers to put on leadership training in our districts and separately for our ministers?

This is an issue we will be addressing at the Unitarian General Assembly Annual Meetings in March – and beyond. Let's start our discussion now.

The Rev Nicky Jenkins is minister with Chorlton Unitarians.

This is the time to revitalise

(Continued from page 3)

misquoted and misapplied verses in the Old Testament. Even so, does it have anything to say to us as Unitarians today as we think of our own future?

The closest translation of the original Hebrew text seems to be this:

'Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.' (Proverbs 29:18, ESV)

The Hebrew word *Chazon* translated here as 'prophetic vision', and the use of both *Chazah* and *Naba* (Prophecy) used throughout the Old Testament, usually refer to a revelation (by an individual prophet) of consequences or probable events. In Proverbs 29:18 the word *Para* translated as 'cast off restraint' (or 'perish') is the same word used in Exodus 32:25 to describe the breakdown of order during the Golden Calf episode and implies 'chaos' or 'loss of original purpose'.

There is nothing mystical about any of this. Prophets were simply intuitive or discerning individuals who saw the bigger picture; consequently they were often not popular because they pointed out the probable consequences of the lifestyles, decisions and actions of those in power. Today we could well include such people as Prof James Lovelock, climate scientist and originator of the Gaia Theory, in this prophetic context. For when we ignore the facts of our existence or lose the purpose of our being, we are already damaging our future prospects. When even a commercial business loses or abandons its core purpose it becomes stretched and thin and eventually fails. 'Blessed is he who keeps the law', obviously refers to the benefit of sticking to your core values or purpose.

What is our Unitarian purpose?

This is as true for individuals as it is for organisations.

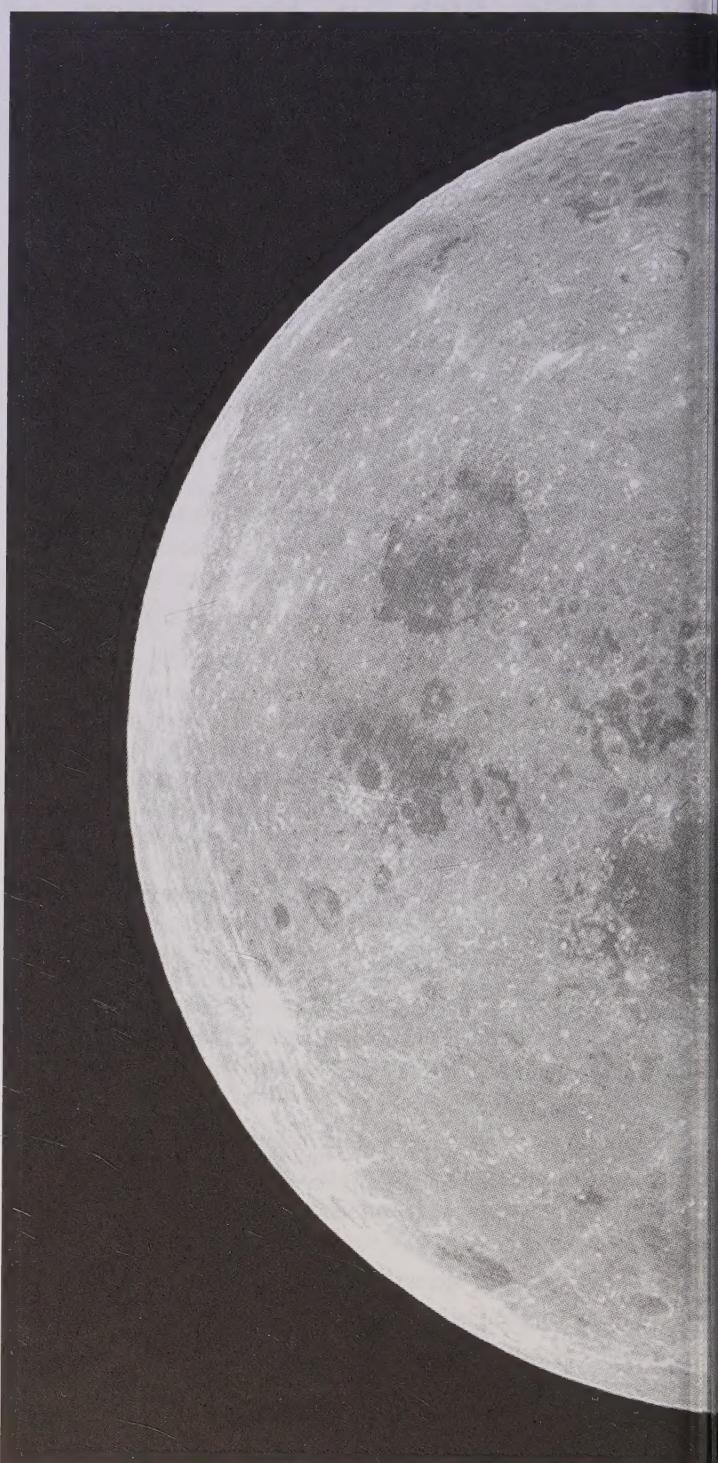
So in 2015 what is our core purpose, our reason for being Unitarians?

Moreover, what is our intrinsic value as individuals: the sum total of our physical parts: calcium, carbon, water? Reduce a human being to basic elements and it is not worth very much, at least not in terms of the old materialistic view based on 19th-century rationalism – once so cherished by demythologisers and evolutionary scientists. In such reductionist views, conscious beings were no more than animated packets of electro-chemical soup. However, such narrow thinking is no longer viable, with any intellectual honesty in the universe revealed by quantum physics, astronomy and cutting edge sciences in the 21st century. Today from so many directions we can see that the individual being is vastly more than the sum of its physical and psychological parts.

Since the beginning of recorded history, leading spiritual teachers of various persuasions have conveyed the beliefs that not only are we more than the sum of our parts; we are containers of the Divine. If we are indeed beings animated by the same Spirit of Life; that is the source of all existence across all time, space and dimensions, what then is the value of our individual life?

It is inestimable!

If we as individuals are containers of the Divine, then movements, religions and organisations are also containers of something that is more than the sum of their physical parts. This is also true of our Unitarian Movement.



View of the moon photographed by Apollo 11 astronauts as they flew past it.

When we look back at how the future was supposed to be, perhaps we need to grab hold of the fact that although the Unitarian Movement was undoubtedly shaped by the decisions of the past, it is not defined by that past: it is defined by the present spirit; the vision within that animates us today. In quantum terms that same Spirit of Life is in every smallest part of the whole reflecting in every direction at every level the reciprocal effects of One totality. Movement is the One fundamental and universal constant. It seems somewhat synchronistic that the very term: *Unitarian Movement*, we so casually use today, grammatically reflects the underlying quantum physical basis of the metaphysical concept of Oneness. If we are containers

e, if we have the vision



Earth. NASA photo

Divine; recipients of quantum realities, then perhaps we should not be surprised that this is so at this particular point in time; a point which the Unitarian ethos is more relevant than ever before.

hat of our future?

day, and everyday, we draw the shape of things to come: the future made not by reliance on the past but by our vision; our thoughts and our actions in the present.

is always the present.

This is our eternal reality

We live in the eternal moment. From the quantum viewpoint we are living in eternity right now; time and space are merely reciprocal

effects of One Eternal Reality. In the quantum universe, Oneness is revealed to be not just an abstract metaphysical concept but a living reality that pervades all levels of existence. This emerging new cosmic perspective is, and will, change philosophy, science, religion and politics in the 21st century. Alongside this new perspective, other changes are coming to our planet: geophysical as well as cosmological. There is nothing anyone can do to stop it. For some it will bring the death of once cherished notions of fundamentalism or materialism. But for those who can ride the cosmic wave of change it will be the dawn of new beginnings.

Where do we, as individuals, and as a movement, stand today: at the end of the road or at the opening of a door?

Personally I believe we stand at the threshold of something new - something, that we can take hold of as a positive vision for our Unitarian future.

Never have people needed the concept of Oneness: One Creation, One World, and One Humanity, more than it is needed today.

Oneness, like love, cannot be truly known through rationalism; it has to be felt in the heart and it has to be shared. Light gives away all its brightness and love gives itself. Throughout the spectrum of existence Light and Love externalise the dynamic nature of Oneness: all we have to do is to share it!

Some may see the Unitarian Movement as a dying cause. I do not see it that way. I see Unitarianism as a reviving and revitalising movement going through a process of change. In all organisations, religions and politics there are short-term thinkers and short-sighted detractors. But the mind is so easily fooled; it rarely sees the larger picture because so often rationalism is trapped within its own constructs. When we want to express how we really believe or feel about something we often say 'from the bottom of my heart' but we never say 'from the bottom of my mind'.

Have we placed too much emphasis on the mind?

Oneness is at our heart

The concept of Oneness is at the heart of our movement; perhaps in the coming changes we need to return to that heart. To the living reality of those core values and principles that makes the Unitarian Movement distinctly different and more directly relevant to the world today than any other faith or religion. When we look inside our own hearts and find that same flame of Oneness that burns there, then maybe together with the same vision we can bring the light of Oneness to the world.

This is the message for this hour, for this age of our world; it is the time of opportunity for a revitalised Unitarian Movement to shine, and light the way for a divided humanity. What is the most relevant Gospel for 21st century humanity? It is surely Oneness! The Unitarian ethos is the real Good News for people everywhere, across all faith and cultural boundaries. But the world will never see it, if we don't set about and share it with enthusiasm and commitment, but we will never have that enthusiasm and commitment if we do not first feel it in our hearts.

For the way to the future is written, not in the stars, but in the core values of the human heart.

©John Pickering, a member of Kendal Unitarians.

Cambridge offers wellness course

By Brendan Boyle

The Cambridge Unitarian community is in the process of reinvigorating itself. Those of you fortunate enough to have visited our beautiful church will know we occupy a very central location. Despite that, many visitors find us almost by chance and we sometimes get the impression that we are almost invisible to the outside world. Like many Unitarian congregations, we'd like to have a more visible profile. How can that be achieved?

That question has kept us occupied during most of the past year. We quickly identified the need to create a totally new website which, whilst still in development, is already up and running and it certainly seems to be bringing in lots more enquiries. <http://www.cambridgeunitarian.org>

There is an enthusiasm to facilitate events that might appeal to a wider audience.

Whilst on holiday in Devon, summer 2013, our minister, Andrew Brown discovered that neighbour Professor John Wilkins (University of Exeter, Classics Department), was involved in a Galen research project – to see if certain ideas and practices from the ancient world have any traction and mileage in the modern world. Over the subsequent year, the idea of running the course in Cambridge developed.

I asked Andrew Brown what specific objectives had he in mind. He replied:

‘A straightforward one of offering people a piece of common sense preventative health-care.’ He saw it as rooting a common sense initiative in something that feels securely part of what it is to be a western European, as well as giving common sense a bit of an attractive historical sheen to encourage people to keep it in mind and therefore actually do it.

Over four Friday evenings in October/November, a group of us (predominantly, but not exclusively, Cambridge Unitarians) explored Galen’s six principles regarding *The Art of Preserving Health* – with particular emphasis on how these principles might transfer into our own age and culture.

For those of you like me, whose classical education is either incomplete or long forgotten, Galen was a Greek doctor and philosopher who practiced in ancient Rome. A prolific writer, his legacy (think bodily humours, blood-letting) formulated medical practice in the West and throughout much of the Muslim world until superseded by scientific breakthroughs in the past 250 years.

Galen’s approach to preventative medicine is holistic, and emphasises six essential factors for promoting wellbeing:

1. The food and drink you consume
2. Getting the right amount of exercise
3. Living and working in an environment conducive to wellbeing
4. Getting the right amount of sleep
5. Actively caring for your mental wellbeing
6. Maintaining balance in all of the other five factors.



Image of Galen from the Wellcome Trust, the global charitable foundation.

A booklet on a ‘Galenic life’ is available here: <http://bit.ly/1Lb8EjX>

The course was conceived as a pilot project in what we hope will become an evolving series: *Philosophy for Ageing Well: a Cambridge Unitarian Project*. As such, it was accepted for inclusion in *Cambridgeshire Celebrates Age 2014*.

We were assisted by stimulating and informative input from Professor Wilkins (week one) and his colleague Dr David Leith (week three), whose participation was sponsored by The Wellcome Trust.

Each session, which included a short ‘mindfulness meditation’, was led by Andrew Brown who guided us through the concepts involved.

Helping us to get into the mindset of Ancient Rome, all this food for the mind was fed by food for the body! Two participants conjured up a delicious selection of dishes based on real Roman recipes using only ingredients available at the time. Needless to say these formed a tasty interlude during each session.

Participants expressed a range of opinions. There was unanimity regarding the relevance of Galen’s broad principles to modern living. How can reflecting on our everyday diets, exercise, environment, mental health and sleep not be worthwhile? Above all, Galen’s principle of ‘balance’ was felt by many to be the most important.

Obviously some of Galen’s ideas have become discredited with scientific advance but it was salutary to acknowledge that in many respects, his six principles are still relevant.

I asked Andrew Brown how he felt it had gone:

‘It went as well as, if not a little better than I expected, given that there was no tried and tested pre-existing model to follow. The previous three other Exeter University facilitated Galen events were in very different settings and contexts, and so the whole thing was very much a trial run. More people than I imagined stayed the course. The drop off from the first evening (34 initial participants dwindled to 18-20) mirrored that which has occurred in similar events I’ve run here. Four weeks is a big chunk of time commitment in a city that puts on a great many other attractive things.’

Andrew thinks longer courses are better because you can go into something in more depth, but wasn’t sure they are a good model for us to pursue. Single one-off events or a one-off with a follow-up may be better. He didn’t think we’d run Galen again in this form. But there could be mileage in hosting a big splash one-off next year as part of Cambridge Festival of Ideas.

This experience has given us much to ponder. We are currently hosting a series of “Heart Song” workshops (<http://www.cambridgeunitarian.org/reflection/courses>), and hope to facilitate and publicise, via our new website, a wide range of experiential events in the months ahead.

Brendan Boyle is a member of Cambridge Unitarians.

We don't need to be like-minded

I recently went on retreat, with a group of people some of whom I knew quite well but still others I had never met before. Over the weekend we explored ways in which we might develop our spiritual well-being, looking specifically at prayer and meditation. It was wonderful to engage with different people, from all kinds of backgrounds and differing spiritual beliefs. People who when they spoke of God, or a power greater than themselves, did not necessarily mean exactly the same thing. Now one phrase I kept on hearing over the first evening was "Oh it's so lovely to be with like-minded people". I heard it from several people. I remember as I listened I thought I'm not sure that we are like-minded, we certainly don't think about things in exactly the same way. I then thought I am not sure I would want to spend my time with like-minded people, people who thought just like me. They would drive me mad and no doubt bore me to death. And then it dawned on me. While we may not be like-minded people we are certainly like-hearted. We may not think in the same way, but I suspect that we feel in the same way and we certainly seem to be searching for that same sense of connection and oneness. There was a real sense of unity in the group. We truly were there lovingly supporting and listening to one another, holding differing views about faith and God and spiritual practise but yet united in a common bond and search.

I think this is what I've been searching for all my life, not the horror of like-minded people, but the beauty of like-hearted folk. It felt like heaven on earth.

'Need not think alike'

As I drove home in silence enjoying a beautiful winter scene a phrase entered my heart and rose up to my mind 'You need not think alike to love alike'. It is a well-known phrase in Unitarian circles and it is certainly something that we aspire toward. Of course we all fall short of this ideal. It has been attributed to Francis David who is seen as the father of established Unitarianism and was the spiritual advisor to King John Sigismund of Transylvania, the Unitarian king who pronounced an act of religious toleration the Edict of Torda in 1568. Now while 'We need not think alike to love alike' is a beautiful sentiment and certainly fits in with the principles of religious toleration, it would appear that there is no real evidence that Francis David ever actually uttered the words. There are arguments as to the original source. Some claim it was the non-Trinitarian martyr Michael Servetus whereas others suggest it was more likely the father of Methodism John Wesley, who asked in a sermon on 'Catholic Spirit,' 'Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?'

Now personally I do not think it is that important who first uttered the words. What matters is the meaning behind them and what has grown and developed from them. What matters to me is the spiritual depth at the core of these simple words. 'We need not think alike to love alike.' Or to put it another way, we need not be like-minded to be like-hearted. To me, this is the essence of the free religious faith to which I have chosen to belong. We are non-creedal; we do not declare a statement of faith and yet we are held together by a sense of love and understanding. My ministerial mantra is, 'Come as you, exactly as you are ... but do not expect to leave in exactly the same condition.' This is an invitation to all, whether they've been here forever or have just walked through the door. It is also an invitation

From Nothing to Everything

by
Danny Crosby



to myself, because I know this ain't easy. And just like everyone else I need to keep on leaving in a new condition. One thing I love about the 'Living the Questions' group I host is that increasingly over time people are coming as they are, exploring with one another openly. They seem to be listening to one another too. Each time we meet, this experience seems to grow. I witness true spiritual intimacy amongst this diverse group of people who are most certainly not like-minded, but are increasingly like-hearted. Each time we meet, we seem to leave in a slightly different condition, whatever subject we explore. People truly are coming as they, exactly as they are, wherever they are coming from. It is hard to come as you truly are, to be who you truly are.

Most folk fear that they will be rejected for being as they truly are, if they let others see the real them. No doubt it happens to every single one of us at one time or another. It is hard to say, 'this is who I am, will you still love me and accept me anyway?' Well, actually, maybe herein lies part of the problem. By saying, 'this is who I am,' are we really showing who we are in a truly open sense? I actually think when we make such statements a barrier is already being formed without us even realising it. Surely it is better to show who we really are. This is about the heart more than the mind; this is about love rather than belief or disbelief. This is about deeds rather than creeds.

Football fan or gay man?

This brings to mind something I heard from a stand-up comedian many years ago. Now he never became famous and I used to see him wandering around the Fallowfield area of Manchester where I lived. He always looked like a bit of a loner, a little bit lost. He wasn't even particularly funny, but something he said really stuck with me. Now it turns out he was gay and he talked about coming out to his mates about this and how he was full of fear initially but it went OK, and they accepted him as he was, with just a bit of laddish humour. He then went on to talk about how he loved football, which was strange for a man originally from Hull. It's a rugby town and Hull were not a big club then. Now I can't tell the joke but the basic punchline was this: He said it was much harder for him to come out to his hip cool, arty and gay friends and companions that he loved football and loved all that went with it, than it was to come out to the football crowd that he was gay. He said these friends found it harder to accept his love of football, than for his football friends to accept him as a gay man.

As he told the tale I saw the sadness and the alienation in him, this sense that he didn't quite belong. Every time I saw him wandering around, always alone, I kind of sensed that feeling

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Letters to the Editor

Minister to leave

SimpleGifts

To the Editor:

It is not without sadness that SimpleGifts announce the departure of the Rev Rob Gregson back to the United States, where family obligations will be taking him sometime in late spring/early summer 2015.

As one of the original founders and first Programme Director of SimpleGifts: Unitarian Centre for Social Action, Rob has played a vital role in the inception and steady growth of this innovative project based at the Unitarian Church and Mission on Mansford Street in East London.

From the first time we opened our doors to the surrounding community in the aftermath of the 2011 urban riots, Rob has been a major force

in our outreach to low income and largely immigrant families, elders and volunteers. Through our local programming, including the After School Club, the weekly community lunch, ESOL classes, parent/toddler play group and teen initiatives, over 150 local residents come through the doors each week. SimpleGifts' reach and scope has extended to the larger Unitarian community as well as through training and social action guidance, an area where Rob's leadership was also invaluable.

Rob's departure means that there will be a forthcoming vacancy at SimpleGifts. The Steering Committee will announce more specifics about the timing and scope of that position shortly.

We wish Rob and his family well in the next chapter of their lives and thank

him on behalf of our staff, Steering Committee, volunteers, local residents and the larger Unitarian community for the groundbreaking work he has done here at SimpleGifts.

Ann Howell

Programme Manager

SimpleGifts: Unitarian Centre for Social Action

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated.

Disillusioned Anglican defector departs

By Graham Phoenix

I 'jumped ship' from the Anglican church three years ago, simply and *solely* as a result of an innate, personal aversion to the doctrine of the Trinity and have spent virtually *all* of the subsequent time enthusiastically applying myself to the task of 'trying Unitarianism on for size'.

I have found that it fits reasonably well but regrettably, not well enough for me personally. My original, clearly misguided assumption was that 'Unitarian' simply meant 'non-Trinitarian' and that I would fit in perfectly well making the transition from Trinitarian Christian to Unitarian Christian, which incidentally is what I have always been and what I will always remain, no matter what.

Extending the analogy of 'jumping ship'; I now feel that I have jumped from a slowly sinking ocean going vessel, with its established, though doomed infrastructure, into a small, half-occupied lifeboat, totally unsuited for an ocean-going voyage and only partially occupied by endlessly arguing occupants. Unless I am being misled by the dismal statistics I have encountered, Unitarianism in the UK is now reduced to a little over 3000 members, of which about only half consider themselves to be Unitarian Christians, the remaining eclectic half comprising the rest. My overall impression is of two separate, essentially different religious movements attempting vainly to coalesce, one of which seems to harbour a discernible bias against any Christian tendencies in the other. This in spite of implication of the declared Object:

Everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves, using: their intellect; their conscience and their own experience of life

The best setting for finding religious truth and meaning is a community that welcomes each individual for themselves, complete with their beliefs, doubts and questions.

I assume that this is intended to convey what you might call the 'ABC' of Unitarianism which I would hope does *not* mean 'Anything But Christian'. (Not my acronym! This is an expression which I have also encountered during my brief studies and research.) Nothing to be done about all of the above, I suppose. I can hear it now; who do I think I am after only three years?

I had also expected to encounter patent, unquestionable solidarity among all the grass roots (individual churches and chapels) and some sort of administrative infrastructure within which all the churches sit. Rather naïve of me I suppose. Of course what I find is a disparate collection of independent little churches, each protectively doing their *own* thing and diligently following whatever local party line is being actively encouraged by whoever happens to be holding the reins. Nothing wrong with this, I suppose, just as long as you happen to stumble across one that fits you. I have endeavoured to engage with as many other congregations as my short time has permitted. Interestingly, it is usually made very clear what beliefs are acceptable and what would meet with local disapproval. Unfortunately my nature has always been to remain true to myself and not to be constrained by the encouragement of tactful expediency in any of its guises. Oh dear ... as someone said to me recently; if only Arius had got his way, we might *all* have been liberal Christians.

This was always intended to be just an informative column, not a rant. So at this point I am inclined to slip quietly away before it turns into one. Time to abandon even the lifeboat, I think. There's bound to be a bigger, more seaworthy vessel along soon.

May the peace of my God remain with us *all*, wherever we may end up.

Graham Phoenix is a member of Ansdell Unitarian Church.

A debate: Rationalist v Mystic Unitarians

By Christine Avery

The command “Only connect”, which is the epigraph to one of EM Forster’s novels, is often quoted. We want people to connect, we want moral principles to be universalised, and we want ideas to knit together into a web of meaning.

But I often hear among my mystically inclined friends, and read in some outstanding theological books, the claim that ‘All is connected’. Already! This seems to link up with the view that we can reach a point ‘beyond good and evil’. More troublingly, I hear the assertion that we are all, as generic human beings, morally indistinguishable from serial murderers and rapists. So there are two distinct perspectives visible here: the sober, common sense one, and the mystical vision. The contradiction puzzles me. It prompted an imaginary dialogue between exponents of the two different views.

The rational Unitarian takes issue with the mystic by asking: Surely some things aren’t meant to be connected, for example, your hand to a hot coal or a child to a paedophile? Apart from such vital disconnections, there are also different degrees of and modes of connectedness: my children are a lot more closely connected to me than any fleeting acquaintance. And my connection with a mountain feels quite different from my connection with a human being. Such differences are real, and can’t be disproved by putting your head in a cloud and claiming that they don’t matter.

Superficial or mundane?

Mystical Unitarian: Ah, you are confusing the superficial and mundane with the ultimate and transcendental truth.

Rational Unitarian: So are there two realms which don’t seem to relate to each other? One is the transcendent while the other is the everyday, practical and material reality? I take it that this is a form of dualism. Dualism is routinely scorned in much theological talk, rather as if it were a glimpse of the allegedly cloven foot of the Devil.

MU: Oh dear – surely you don’t believe in the Devil?

RU: No, of course not – or not literally, but maybe the idea

Seeking like-hearted

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grow. Maybe I identified with him in some ways, as for a lot of my life I felt this sense of alienation too. Maybe we all do, maybe everyone feels this sense that they don’t truly belong from time to time. Maybe it’s tough to come as we are, exactly as we are ... maybe when we come we don’t expect to change either. Maybe we think we will always leave in exactly the same condition. My hope is that when people enter into the communities I serve that they feel that they can be who they are, exactly as they are. Warts and all and beauty spots too. I hope they find amongst us loving companionship and space to search and explore and open their hearts, minds and souls to something beyond the confines of themselves. I hope when they come, even if they are in despair, that when they leave they do so with a deeper sense of belonging and do not feel alone. I hope they find amongst us communities of like-hearted, if not like-minded people. For we may not think alike; but it is certainly our intention to love alike.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

was picture language for a continuing reality. I am a dualist myself in an important sense. To my perception, we inhabit a dual Universe. Everything depends on contrast and tension. That’s a philosophical point, but there is also a linked ethical one.

Potential not the same as evil-doing

You argue, as a mystic, that there is no real difference between the saint and the serial murderer and rapist. Both are human; both have the same potential for evil, so they cannot be distinguished from each other. Also, saints tend to have a graceful tendency to claim to be the worst of sinners. There are subtleties and mysteries here. But how can you ignore the deep gulf between having a capacity for evil and actually committing the deeply evil, pain-inflicting act? Squashing these two realities together isn’t acceptable to me as a rational being. And doesn’t it open the door to a facile and soporific state of mind? Please note that acknowledging the gulf between potential and actualisation in no way implies that you classify or treat the murderer as non-human. Principles of civilised conduct must be applied at all points, including in our just dealings with criminals.

The Mystic then suggests that meditation would, sooner or later, deliver the Rational Unitarian to that blessed realm beyond good and evil.

But now a third contender enters, the hopefully Holistic Unitarian. She says: I suggest that the challenge of living in this world centres on achieving connection, e.g. between your emotions and your intellect, or your principles and your conduct. And if we go back to EM Forster’s epigraph to *Howards’ End*, we surely find that he was referring to soberly meaningful, worked out, morally aware connections, not to a tendency to reduce all the world to Sameness Soup.

Practising the art of life

Life also gives you the job of separating things which are in a harmful or ugly connection. Psyche in the Greek myth, needed to sort out the piles of seeds – to discriminate. It also looks to me as if you really do need to make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear – because this is creative, this is heroic, this is where we realise our full humanity in rising to challenges. Artists do it all the time – and we are called to practise the art of life.

It may be that all phenomena are ultimately connected, in the mind of God – or the Anima Mundi – or in the Field of Energy of which the Universe may consist. And, quite possibly, imagining this transcendental situation rests and aids the human mind. There is a realm of underlying reality where all the larger patterns can be seen, accepted, even participated in. And worship at its best lets us touch the fringes of this realm. More generally, the vision of transcendence simply can’t be described in prose terms. It can be granted in times of high emotion, whether created by life events or by art. This is the ‘glory that shines upon our tears’ and whose unmistakable nobility and beauty reconciles us – in the end. But the journey towards it goes through unavoidable struggle and even despair and is essentially individual. No one else can do it for you, even though other people’s experience is an indispensable aid on your journey.

Christine Avery is a member of Plymouth Unitarians.

News in brief



Kate Whyman was inducted into the ministry of Plymouth Unitarian Church on 6 December.

The Mayor of Plymouth welcomed Kate to the city. The Rev Bill Darlison took the service which was thoughtful and inspiring. More than 100 people attended and they included representatives from other faiths in the city. Unitarian members of the Western Union and others came from far and wide. A celebratory meal was held after the service.

We are lucky to have Kate as our minister. She works very hard for our church in all ways. She has great emotional intelligence; her services are challenging, thought-provoking and inspiring, and she will be a great asset for our church and its ongoing development.

Photo: (l-r) Lord Mayor Councillor Michael Robert Fox, Lady Mayoress Rosemary Fox, the Revs Kate Whyman and Bill Darlison

— Ann Kader

Flying the Unitarian flag in SA



When Steven Iain Moseley and Nicola Van Der Merwe decided to get married in Cape Town they struggled to find someone to officiate. Steven consulted with his mum Mary-Jean Hennis (administrator for the Unitarian General Assembly in London) and she found a Unitarian minister in Cape Town who agreed to do the service – which made Nicola's religious Afrikaans parents very happy. The photo shows the couple with the Rev Roux Malan, minister of the Cape Town Unitarian Church who trained at Unitarian College, Manchester.

Mary Jean said: 'Roux Malan was amazing. The children were thrilled and Nicola's family approved wholeheartedly. The only thing was that people wanted to know who Roux was and where he was from. Of course, the minute I said he is a Unitarian the very next question was 'What is a Unitarian?' I gave it my best shot and flew the flag high and hopefully some of them will keep their promises and go and seek Roux out.'

BUYAN plans AGM, social in Manchester

The British Unitarian Young Adult Network (BUYAN) is the group for Unitarians aged 18-35! We will next be getting together at Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL on 21 March from noon-6. This will be our Annual General

Meeting and we'll be thinking about our plans for the current year. We'll also be spending time exploring the theme of 'Resolution' and we'll be looking at exploring our resolutions and finding clarity in our own lives spiritually.

We will, of course, get to hang out and enjoy each other's company. We'll be providing a lunch and if anyone would otherwise be unable to attend due to travelling costs, please let us know as we should be able to provide some assistance. For more details, you can contact us at contactbuyan@gmail.com or via our Facebook group BUYAN (Unitarians 18-35).

— Andrew Rosser



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EC member weds at Hucklow



Lorna Hill and Unitarian General Assembly Executive Committee Member James Barry were married on 1 November at the Old Chapel, Great Hucklow.

The Old Chapel was chosen as the couple first met at the Nightingale Centre, and it was halfway between James's family in Sussex and Lorna's family, mostly in Scotland, with other family members coming from Australia, Germany and Norway. The congregation was welcomed by Liz Shaw, minister of Old Chapel, and the ceremony was conducted by Lorna's father, the Rev Andrew Hill. Anna Barry, James' sister, played the piano. James's sister, Nicola, read 'Joining hands' by Helen March. Sarah Atkinson sang 'Light of heavens window' during the musical interlude. The marriage was registered by the Rev David Shaw, authorised person for the Chapel.

— Margaret Hill